

# The Earliest Phase of Christian Pilgrimage in the Near East (before the 7th Century)

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In discussing the origins and early development of the practice of pilgrimage within the Christian context,<sup>1</sup> I begin with a brief reflection on the terms *pilgrimage* and *pilgrim*. The word *pilgrim*, derived as it is from the Latin *peregrinus*, which was used to designate the stranger or traveler, focuses our attention on an aspect of his or her activity that perhaps is not the essential one—the journey undertaken, the *peregrinatio*. Yet in practice, even if the term *pilgrimage* puts the emphasis on this idea of a physical displacement, be it over a great distance or more usually, in the case of the majority of “pilgrims,” no more than a short trip within the locality, what provided the real meaning to this movement was the place that was the object of the pilgrim’s attention, a place he considered as possessing a particular value or holiness and where he went in an attitude of prayer and adoration, as well as with a certain veneration for the object or person whose presence served to establish the reputed sanctity of the place. It thus follows that to investigate the origins of Christian pilgrimage is first to invite reflection on the existence and eventual veneration of holy places within the Christian world of the first centuries A.D. I may note in passing that it is not my intention to discuss that form of pilgrimage closely associated with the ascetic life, the *xeniteia* both advocated and lived by certain monks of the early Christian centuries.<sup>2</sup>

I begin by stating the obvious: Christianity is the product of Judaism, and only slowly did it manage to distance itself from this early background. The Jews did, in fact, have their holy places: Jerusalem was the “holy city” containing the Temple in which was to be

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<sup>1</sup> For a general bibliography on Christian pilgrimage in the Near East during the first centuries, see B. Köting, *Peregrinatio religiosa: Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen in der alten Kirche* (Münster, 1950); J. Wilkinson, *Palestine Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977); E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312–460* (Oxford, 1982); P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient: Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe* (Paris, 1985). On the following period, see idem, “I pellegrinaggi dei cristiani nei luoghi santi della Palestina prima delle Crociate,” in *Piacenza a la prima Crociata* (Reggio Emilia, 1995), 35–50. For Egypt see A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Egypte: Des Byzantins aux Abbasides* (Paris, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> See H. von Campenhausen, *Die ascetische Heimatlosigkeit im altkirchlichen und frühmittelalterlichen Mönchtum* (Tübingen, 1930), repr. in *Tradition und Leben: Kräfte der Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen, 1960), 290–317; A. Guillaumont, “Le dépaysement comme forme d’ascèse dans le monachisme ancien,” *AnnEPHE*, 5th. ser., 76 (1968–69): 31–58.

found the holy of holies, and it was an annual obligation for Jews to go to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple. There were places that likewise became the object of occasional veneration: the tombs of the prophets; certain sites such as that at Mamre; or Jacob's well at Shechem, among others. This same attitude was apparent among some of the first disciples of Christ: Peter and John went to the Temple to pray (Acts 3:1); Paul went to Jerusalem and also worshiped in the Temple (Acts 21:6). Yet very soon voices of discord could be heard opposing the sacralization of places, voices that reechoed in this respect criticism already apparent within certain Jewish circles: Stephen criticized the idea of the Temple as a holy place (Acts 7:47–49); the Gospels noted Christ's attack on the veneration of the tombs of the prophets (Mt. 23:29); but it is finally in the Gospel of John that the most stringent reserve comes to the fore when it is noted that God is to be worshiped neither in Jerusalem, the holy place of the Jews, nor in Gerizim, the holy place of the Samaritans, but rather in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:21). This tendency came to be dominant within the Greek-speaking part of the Christian world during the second and third centuries: Christian writers of this period were concerned to demonstrate that Christianity, in distinction to both paganism and Judaism, required neither temples nor altars nor even specific places for worship since this was to be done in the spirit. If Christians could hold their meetings anywhere, it was because their God "is not limited by place, but, being invisible, fills the heavens and the earth, and thus is he adored and glorified by the faithful everywhere."<sup>3</sup> According to Clement of Alexandria, "the true temple is the assembly of Christian people,"<sup>4</sup> and Origen adds: "the holy place is the pure soul."<sup>5</sup> This must explain the almost total silence of the sources until the fourth century about what later came to be known as the "holy places."

An almost total silence: still it would be useful to comment briefly on the "almost." Even if the dominant tendency within the Hellenistic version of Christianity at the time took no interest in these things and rejected the idea of the sacralization of certain places, it may yet be asked whether there was not a residual attitude of veneration among the Judeo-Christians of those places not only associated with recollections of the Old Testament but those connected with the principal events in the life of Christ. A number of pointers suggest a pious interest within the primitive community in Jerusalem that found expression in the organization of visits to the sites that had witnessed the final stages of Christ's life. This was certainly the case for his tomb: the account of the resurrection contained in the Gospel of Mark makes possible allusion to such visits,<sup>6</sup> and the phrase placed in the mouth of the angel seems like the commentary of a tour guide: "This then is the place they put him" (Mk. 16:6).<sup>7</sup> Aside from this tomb, which had been hewn out of the rock, two other grottos came to be of note, of which one was already mentioned as early as the second cen-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Justin's answer to the judge before his martyrdom in *Passio Justini et sociorum*, rec. B, 3; H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972), 48.

<sup>4</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 8.5 (GCS 17, p. 22); Origen, *Homil. in Levit.*, 13.5. Cf. the echo of this sentence, Jerome, *Epist.* 58.7 (CSEL 54, p. 536).

<sup>5</sup> Origen, *Homil. in Levit.*, 13.5; Jerome, *Epist.* 58.7 (CSEL 54, p. 536). In a more general sense, certain commentators felt that the origin of the accounts of the Passion might be related to their commemoration of the sites themselves by the brothers of Jerusalem and the pilgrims to the Holy Land; cf. E. Trocmé, *The Passion as Liturgy. A Study in the Origin of the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (London, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, which derived from a more Hellenistic environment, attempted to correct this tendency through the words of the angel warning not to seek Christ among the dead: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but he is risen" (24: 5–6).

tury A.D. These were the place on the Mount of Olives where Christ had his last meeting with the disciples and the site of his birth in Bethlehem.

In the absence of any reliable archaeological evidence, the literary sources are not easy to interpret, though it may be said that “one can eventually admit the Judeo-Christian frequentation of these grottos at least until 135.”<sup>8</sup> Thereafter at least two of these sites were inaccessible to the Christians, since the tomb had been buried under the rubble of the capitol in Jerusalem and the site at Bethlehem had been included within a sacred wood dedicated to Adonis.<sup>9</sup> Still it is natural enough to suppose that these places were in no way forgotten within the local community, which explains the rediscovery of the tomb in 325. In any case, aside from the possible veneration of these sites by Judeo-Christians from the earliest times, there is practically no evidence of a similar regard toward the other biblical sites on the part of the Christian community of the first three centuries. None of the occasional Christian visitors to Palestine during the third century about whom anything is known—one thinks of Melito of Sardis, Pionios the priest of Smyrna, and Origen—gave evidence in their subsequent accounts of having undertaken the voyage as pilgrims who were intent on praying in places deemed to be holy, but it seems rather that they went out of a sense of curiosity or in search of theological insight.<sup>10</sup>

Should it then be concluded that the Christians of the second and third centuries outside of Palestine were wholly spiritual and totally immune from the veneration of object and place that came to be developed from the fourth century on? Some sign of a change in this attitude can be found in the first examples of the cult of the martyrs. Although the evidence is indeed sparse, it does suggest that the tombs of the martyrs became places of assembly for the Christian community on the anniversary of their death, a practice that in many respects recalls the cult of the dead that existed within the Greco-Roman world at the time. Moreover, it seems that from the second century, whenever they could be recovered, the martyrs’ remains were much sought after and thus the object of a certain veneration. The assimilation of the martyr’s body to the bread of the eucharist that can be found in the letters of Ignatios of Antioch already tends in this direction,<sup>11</sup> though there are other, more concrete examples. According to the *Passio* of Polycarp, which dates from about 160, the Church of Smyrna had the “holy remains” (*hagion sarkion*) of the bishop, his bones which were “more precious (*timiōtera*, a term that can often later be found applied to relics) than valuable stones and more estimable than gold,” kept in a suitable place

<sup>8</sup> S. Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien. Essais historiques* (Paris, 1998), 364. See esp. chap. 4.1.1, “Archéologie culturelle dite ‘judéo-chrétienne’ en Palestine.”

<sup>9</sup> Jerome, *Epist.* 58.3 (CSEL 54, pp. 531–32).

<sup>10</sup> Melito of Sardis went to Palestine to learn the order of the Old Testament books; cf. Eusebios, *Hist. eccl.*, 4.26.13–14. The priest Pionios, who was put to death at Smyrna in 250, declared in a final discourse directed against the Jews that he had seen in Palestine “a land that witnesses even today to the anger of God raised against the sins of its inhabitants” (*Passio Pionii*, 4.18–20, ed. L. Robert, *Le Martyre de Pionios, prêtre de Smyrne* [Washington, D.C., 1994], pp. 23, 35). Origen, at the same time, says he visited some sites “in search of traces of Jesus, of his disciples and of his prophets,” but he cites the example only to decide between two rival interpretations of Gospel passages, and in another case he only refers to what can be seen at Bethlehem in order to confirm the biblical narrative (*In Joannem comm.*, 6.204 [SC 157, p. 286]; *Contra Celsum*, 1.51 [SC 132, p. 214]). When, in his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, which dates from ca. 320 prior to the constructions undertaken by Constantine at Jerusalem and the expansion of pilgrimages, Eusebios of Caesarea speaks of Christians who came to worship on the Mount of Olives, it was really to stress that from there they could see the fulfillment of the prophecy in the ruin of Jerusalem and its temple (6.18.23; GCS 23, p. 278).

<sup>11</sup> Ignatios of Antioch, *Epist. ad Rom.*, 4.1: “I am the wheat of God, and I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ.”

where the anniversary of his martyrdom could be celebrated.<sup>12</sup> Likewise the letter of Polykrates of Ephesos to Victor of Rome confirms that the tombs of the saints and their earthly remains were already objects of interest to the faithful, since it mentions the presence in Asia of the tombs of John, Philip, and Philip's daughters.<sup>13</sup> The increase in the number of Christians during the third century, which was particularly marked during the second half, the period of the so-called truce of the Church, and the corresponding construction of places of worship, necessarily favored this tendency toward the sacralization of persons and places. Clear evidence of this can be seen in the martyrdom of Cyprian at Carthage in 258, when Christians laid out cloths to receive the blood of the martyred bishop before his execution.<sup>14</sup>

The truce of the Church served to accentuate this phenomenon, which was first apparent with regard to the biblical sites. Eusebios in his *Onomasticon*, which can perhaps be dated from as early as the 290s and in any case before 311,<sup>15</sup> gives evidence of the growing interest of these sites for Christians. Granted that in many cases he was content to remark without more ado that here was shown (*deiknutaí*) some souvenir of a biblical event, yet he thus reveals that Christians liked to meet for prayer at Gethsemane or to be baptized at Bethabara, the site of the baptism of Christ.<sup>16</sup> Despite his concern in his apologetic works to show that attachment to particular places was characteristic of Judaism, not Christianity, which was in this respect wholly independent of place,<sup>17</sup> Eusebios, in his *Evangelical Demonstration* (dated 314–320), notes that Christians from Jerusalem liked to meet “for prayer” on the Mount of Olives, and he consciously juxtaposed the worship that took place there with that of the Jews in their Temple which stood on the hill opposite.<sup>18</sup> Even though it is not explicitly stated, this is a clear example of the transfer of a holy place: the sacralization of places by Christians already begun.

Under Constantine this became a political program. During his stay at Rome between 312 and 324, the emperor favored the establishment of sanctuaries on the tombs of the Roman martyrs,<sup>19</sup> while in the East the bulk of his effort was focused on Jerusalem. It was following the Council of Nicea in 325 that, on the orders of the emperor,<sup>20</sup> an order given according to legend in the presence of his mother, Bishop Makarios of Jerusalem began the

<sup>12</sup> *Passio Polycarpi*, 18 (ed. Musurillo, pp. 16–17).

<sup>13</sup> Eusebios of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.*, 5.24.5.

<sup>14</sup> *Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani*, 5.4 (ed. Musurillo, pp. 174–75).

<sup>15</sup> T. D. Barnes considers that the book *On the Names of Places in Holy Scripture*, which deals with the historical geography of Palestine, of which only the fourth part, the *Onomasticon* survives, dates from ca. 290; cf. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 110–11.

<sup>16</sup> Eusebios of Caesarea, *Onomasticon*, pp. 74.17–18, 58.19–20 (GCS 11, ed. E. Klostermann).

<sup>17</sup> “Since the coming of Christ, it is no longer necessary to adore God in specific places, in some corner of the world be it in the mountains or in the temples made by the hand of man, but each can adore him in his proper place” (Eusebios of Caesarea, *Dem. Evang.*, 1.6.65; GCS 23, p. 33; see also, *ibid.*, 40, p. 29, as well as *Theophaneia*, 4.23 [GCS 11, vol. 2, pp. 200–201]). Jerome again raises this issue: “Since the drying of the fleece of Judea, the universe has been moistened by celestial dew (cf. Jgs. 6:36–40) since many from both east and west have fallen asleep in the bosom of Abraham (cf. Lk. 16:22–23), so God has ceased to be known only in Judea (Ps. 75:2) and his name glorified only in Israel (Ps. 18:5), but the voice of the apostles has been directed to the whole world and their words to its very limits.” (*Epist.* 58.3, p. 530).

<sup>18</sup> Eusebios of Caesarea, *Dem. Evang.*, 6.18.23 (GCS 23, p. 278).

<sup>19</sup> R. Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton, N.J., 1980).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Vita Constantini*, 3.30–32 (GCS, pp. 97–99, ed. Winkelmann).

search that led to the rediscovery of both the tomb and the cross of Christ.<sup>21</sup> A building program was then set up, which was in no way fortuitous, since sanctuaries were to be erected on the sites that well illustrated the fundamental affirmations of the creed: he was born, died, and was resurrected; and he ascended into heaven. The basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, those of the Anastasis and the Martyrium, those on either side of the atrium at Golgotha, as well as that on the Mount of Olives—all are constructions of Constantine undertaken on the orders of the emperor and with public funds.<sup>22</sup> To these would be added a little later the sanctuary at Mamre,<sup>23</sup> an Old Testament site to be sure, but the three visitors to Abraham were usually identified by the Fathers as a prefiguration of the Christian Trinity. In his letter to Bishop Makarios, Constantine was the first to employ the term *holy place*, which would become common currency during the course of the fourth century.<sup>24</sup> The development of these holy places through the establishment of sanctuaries at Jerusalem and then throughout Palestine would continue for another three centuries, which were to be marked by three periods of intense activity: the time of Constantine, just mentioned; that of Eudokia, the wife of Theodosios II, after 437;<sup>25</sup> and that of Justinian.<sup>26</sup> The bishops, together with a variety of wealthy visitors to Palestine, carried on and completed this work according to their means. At the end of the fourth century, Bishop John started work on the great basilica at Sion,<sup>27</sup> and the pilgrim Poemenia commissioned the church of the Ascension;<sup>28</sup> at the beginning of the sixth century, Patriarch Elias started building the Nea church of the Theotokos, which would have to wait for the financial support of Justinian to be completed.<sup>29</sup> Following the fall of Jerusalem to the Persians in 614, at the initiative of Patriarch Modestos there was an effort of restoration or rather rebuilding of the sanctuaries that had been damaged. Nor was such activity limited to Jerusalem. Throughout Palestine an elaborate inventory of the holy places was compiled on the basis of biblical texts, local tradition, and various forms of revelation, many of which, it may be felt, owed much to the imagination, though all were strictly controlled by the episcopal hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> This led to the creation all along the main routes of Palestine of sanctuaries of varying degrees of importance, around which were soon to be established monasteries for liturgical services and hostels to receive pilgrims. Relics also came to be more common—relics of the Passion, of the life of Christ and that of the Virgin, of figures

<sup>21</sup> Cf. S. Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found. From Event to Medieval Legend* (Stockholm, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> On the Anastasis-Golgotha-Martyrium, see Ch. Coüasnon, *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem* (London, 1974), V. Corbo, *Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme. Aspetti archeologici dalle origini al periodo crociato* (Jerusalem, 1974); M. Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Stroud, 1999). On Eleona's church, see H. Vincent and F. M. Abel, *Jérusalem: Recherches d'archéologie et d'histoire. II. Jérusalem nouvelle* (Paris, 1926), 337–60 (excavations of 1910).

<sup>23</sup> This church was also built on Constantine's initiative; see Eusebios of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, 3.52. On this site, see A. E. Mader, *Mambre: Die Ergebnisse den Ausgrabungen im Heiligen Bezirk Hamet el Halil in Südpalästina, 1926–1928* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1957).

<sup>24</sup> Eusebios of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, 3.52. Eusebios does not use the term *holy place* again in the following text.

<sup>25</sup> This activity is briefly mentioned by Socrates, *Hist. eccl.*, 7.47.2 (GCS, n.s. 3, p. 394). The church of St. Stephen was built on the initiative of Eudokia.

<sup>26</sup> Y. Hirschfeld, "Imperial Building Activity during the Reign of Justinian and Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in Light of the Excavations on Mt. Berenice, Tiberias," *Rev Bibl* 106 (1999): 236–49.

<sup>27</sup> *Grand Lectionnaire*, 565 (CSCO 189, p. 80).

<sup>28</sup> *Vita Petri Iberi* (ed. R. Raabe, *Petrus der Iberer*, p. 35).

<sup>29</sup> Cyril of Skythopolis, *Vita Sabae*, 72–72 (ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* [Leipzig, 1939], pp. 175–78); *Vita Ioannis Hesych.*, 20, *ibid.*, p. 216; Prokopios of Caesarea, *Aed.*, 5.6.

<sup>30</sup> P. Maraval, "Songes et visions comme mode d'invention des reliques," *Augustinianum* 29 (1989): 583–99.

from the Bible, and a little later *acheirypoietoi* images—all of which became occasions for the foundation of new sanctuaries in their own right. All of this confirms the success of what were now termed without reserve the “holy places,” which drew pilgrims from far and near and served to establish Jerusalem and the Holy Land as the focal point of Christian sacred geography.

This phenomenon, which had such an effect on the holy places of the Bible, was perhaps even more in evidence with regard to the tombs of the martyrs. Once again an indication of the changing situation or mind-set can be gained from the writings of Eusebios in comparing the two versions of his *Martyrs of Palestine*. The first version simply states that the martyrs of Caesarea “obtained a decent funeral and the usual burial,”<sup>31</sup> but this is then amplified in the later edition to reveal that shortly after their martyrdom the bodies were deposited “in the splendid abodes of the temple (*naon*) and placed in the sacred oratories (*en hieriois proseukteriois*), as an everlasting memorial to be honored by the people of God.” More or less throughout the empire the tombs of the martyrs came to be adorned with multiple sanctuaries in the form of martyria, oratories, and basilicas, all of which were themselves held as sacred, as holy places. Once again there would be the process of the discovery or rediscovery of the tombs and relics of martyrs until then sometimes unknown, and once again the whole process was controlled by the bishops as part of a conscious policy of Christianization. Thus Cyril of Alexandria—unless it was his successor, Peter Mongos—discovered the relics of Abbakynos and John, which he successfully opposed to a sanctuary of the goddess Isis at Menuthis.<sup>32</sup> This movement developed throughout the fourth century and hardly ever stopped thereafter. To give but one example: in the town of Sebasteia the feast of the Forty Martyrs had been celebrated from early on, but it was only from 380 that a new festival appeared, that of Bishop Peter, who had also been a victim of the Great Persecution, but whose memory had paled in comparison to that of the Forty.<sup>33</sup> The texts of the numerous *Passiones* of the martyrs composed during the fifth and sixth centuries, which in the absence of the true story were often recompositions on the basis of stereotyped models, provide us with knowledge of some of the sanctuaries rather than with the real history of the martyrs themselves. Without seeking to establish a sort of hierarchy, I will mention the most famous: St. Menas in Egypt became a major center of pilgrimage,<sup>34</sup> together with the sanctuary of Sts. Abbakynos and

<sup>31</sup> Eusebios of Caesarea, *De Martyribus Palestinae*, 11.28.

<sup>32</sup> Sophronios, *Miracula Cyri et Ioannis*, 29, ed. N. Fernandez Marcos, *Los “Thaumata” de Sofronio. Contribución al estudio de la “incubatio cristiana”* (Madrid, 1975), 298–302. E. Wipszycka adopted the hypothesis of L. Duchesne according to which the translation of the relics did not take place until the time of Peter; cf. “La christianisation de l’Égypte aux IV–VIe siècles. Aspects sociaux et ethniques,” *Aegyptus* 68 (1988): 117–65.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory of Nyssa is the first witness to the celebration of the feast of Bishop Peter of Sebasteia; cf. *Epist.* 1.5 (GNO, p. 4; SC 363, p. 86); P. Devos, “S. Pierre Ier, évêque de Sébastée dans une lettre de Grégoire de Nazianze [a letter now attributed again to Gregory of Nyssa],” *AB* 79 (1961): 355. The feast was created by Gregory’s brother, whose name was Peter, who became bishop of Sebasteia probably after the Council of Constantinople in 381; for the new bishop it was a way of asserting his legitimacy.

<sup>34</sup> The site of Abu Mina has been excavated since the beginning of this century; cf. C. M. Kaufmann, *Die Heilige Stadt der Wüste: Unsere Entdeckungen, Grabungen und Funde in der altchristlichen Menasstadt* (Kempten, 1924); *RBK* 3:1116–58 (Karm Abu Mena); P. Grossmann, “Recenti risultati dagli scavi di Abu Mina,” *Corsi Rav* 18 (Ravenna, 1981): 125–76; idem, “The Pilgrimage Center of Abū Mīnā,” in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. D. Frankfurter (Leiden, 1998), 281–302; idem, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (Leiden, 2002), 401–12.

John at Menuthis;<sup>35</sup> in Syria the town of Sergiopolis grew up around the pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Sergios;<sup>36</sup> in Seleukeia in Isauria there was the sanctuary of St. Thekla,<sup>37</sup> at Ephesos that of St. John,<sup>38</sup> at Chalcedon that of St. Euphemia,<sup>39</sup> at Euchaïta that of St. Theodore,<sup>40</sup> and at Thessalonike that of St. Demetrios.<sup>41</sup> Those about whom we know anything are but the tip of the iceberg: the vast majority are and will remain unknown. Thus Gregory of Nyssa, in a letter that must date from the 380s, declared that there were in Cappadocia alone innumerable martyria, though the surviving evidence allows us to mention no more than about fifteen.<sup>42</sup> It may also be noted that the translation of relics further facilitated the multiplication of these sanctuaries; this was the case in Cappadocia, which came to count several of the martyria from the Forty of Sebasteia.<sup>43</sup>

There were not only the tombs of the martyrs: other saints soon also appeared, the "holy men" of the Christians, the monks and bishops, or at least some of them. This phenomenon had different aspects in different places. If, from the fourth century on, Egypt drew pilgrims longing to see the monks and eager to profit from their contact,<sup>44</sup> the latter did their very best to prevent their remains becoming the object of veneration among the faithful: Antony requested that his tomb be kept a secret, though it was rediscovered during the sixth century.<sup>45</sup> In Palestine the remains of Hilarion, who died in Cyprus, were taken by one of his disciples and brought back to a monastery, where they soon became the object of devotion,<sup>46</sup> just as throughout the sixth century would be the tombs of the great monastic founders, such as Euthymios or Sabas.<sup>47</sup> In Syria, even during their lifetime certain monks attracted numerous visitors, as was the case with Symeon the Elder, images of whom also helped to spread the cult. Even after his death, when his remains had been

<sup>35</sup> On this vanished sanctuary, we have only literary sources, essentially the *Miracula Cyri et Johannis* of Sophronios, ed. Fernandez Marcos (as above, note 32). See D. Montserrat, "Pilgrimage to the Shrine of SS Cyrus and John at Menouthis in Late Antiquity," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space*, 257–79.

<sup>36</sup> The site of Resafa has been excavated over the course of the last century: see H. Spanner and S. Guyer, *Resafa, die Wallfahrtsstadt des heiligen Sergios* (Berlin, 1926); W. Karnapp, "Deutsche Grabungen und Forschungen in der Ruinenstadt Resafa in Syrien," *Antike Welt* 8.4 (1977): 17–30; T. Ulbert, *Resafa, II: Die Basilika des Heiligen Kreuzes in Resafa-Sergiopolis* (Mainz, 1986); W. Brinker, "Zur Wasserversorgung von Resafa-Sergiopolis," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 5 (1991): 119–46.

<sup>37</sup> For excavations on the site of Ayatecla near Silifke, see E. Herzfeld and S. Guyer, *Meriamlik und Korykos, zwei christliche Ruinenstätten des Rauhen Kilikiens*, MAMA 2 (Manchester, 1930), 1–89.

<sup>38</sup> *Forschungen in Ephesos, IV.13: Die Johanneskirche* (Vienna, 1951); *RBK* 2:180–92 (Ephesos).

<sup>39</sup> On this now vanished sanctuary, see A.-M. Schneider, "Sankt Euphemia und das Konzil von Chalkedon," in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, vol. 1, ed. A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht (Würzburg, 1951), 291–302.

<sup>40</sup> No monograph has been devoted to this sanctuary, which is known only through literary sources and two inscriptions (I. Ševčenko and C. Mango, "Three Inscriptions of the Reigns of Anastasius and Constantine V. I. Two Inscriptions from Euchaïta," *BZ* 65 [1972]: 379–84).

<sup>41</sup> G. and M. Soteriou, *Ἡ βασιλικὴ τοῦ Ἀγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης* (Athens, 1952).

<sup>42</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Epist.* 2.9 (GNO, p. 16; SC 363, p. 114); see Maraval, *Lieux saints*, 371–74.

<sup>43</sup> See P. Maraval, "Les premiers développements du culte des Quarante Martyrs de Sébastée dans l'Orient byzantin et en Occident," *VetChr* 36 (1999): 198–200.

<sup>44</sup> There are many examples, from Melania the Elder to Postumianus (Egeria, Paula, Jerome, Poemenia, etc.).

<sup>45</sup> Athanasios, *Vita Antonii*, 91.7 (SC 400, p. 370).

<sup>46</sup> Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis*, 32.6–7 (ed. A. Bastiaensen, *Vite dei santi*, vol. 4 [Milan, 1975], p. 142).

<sup>47</sup> Cyril of Skythopolis, *Vita Euthymii*, 50–59 (72–82, ed. Schwartz). See also A. Barrois, "Chronique III. Une chapelle funéraire au couvent de Saint-Euthyme," *RevBibl* 39 (1930): 272–75. Sabas's grave is today venerated at Mar Saba.

transported to Antioch, the great basilica of Qal'at Sem'an was build around his column, and this became the object of frequent pilgrimage, as was evident from the numerous hostels set up in the vicinity.<sup>48</sup> Then, a little later, a church was constructed around the column of his emulator, Symeon the Younger Stylite, to welcome pilgrims even during his lifetime.<sup>49</sup>

To these three categories of pilgrimage places must be added another: sanctuaries dedicated to angels. The cult of the angels, although condemned as a residue of Judaism by a local council toward the end of the fourth century,<sup>50</sup> quickly expanded from the beginning of the fifth, especially in Phrygia, from which it spread to many regions including the capital.<sup>51</sup>

Constantinople would soon be of great importance within the sacred geography of the East, presented as it was from the fifth century on as a second Jerusalem. This sacralization was clearly the result of a deliberate policy, as the capital otherwise possessed no more than two local martyria at the outset, those of St. Akakios and St. Mokios. Here patristic scholars have sought to credit the emperor Constantine, who has been presented as the one truly responsible for the program of construction of both churches and martyria, but in reality the phenomenon was progressive. It certainly began from the time of Constantine, since his mother, Helen, had him bring part of the relic of the cross from Jerusalem, as well as the nails of the Passion—relics that would long be reserved for the use of the palace and the imperial family, as when a fragment of the cross was inserted into a monumental statue of Constantine or the nails were used to construct a helmet and a bit for the imperial horse. These relics would not cease to flow from Palestine: there were relics of the patriarch Joseph; of the prophet Zacharias; of St. Stephen in the fifth century; clothing of the Virgin toward 472, which was deposited in the church of Blachernai, while her belt was placed in that of Chalkoprateia; the trumpets from the fall of Jericho; stone from the surrounds of Jacob's well; the *acheiropoietos* image of the Kamoulianai Christ in the sixth century; in 614 the holy lance and sponge; and then twenty years later another relic of the cross. The same goes for the relics of the martyrs, which were brought from every corner of the Christian world, though often with some difficulty, as when the popes refused to send the relics of St. Peter and St. Paul on the grounds that in the West the bones of martyrs were not to be dispersed and they thus had to be content with a delivery of secondary relics, such as a link from the apostle's chains or cloth that had been placed on his tomb.

This collection of relics was certainly a deliberate policy, one promoted by the emperors, the bishops, state officials, the clergy, and the monks. They started to arrive during the

<sup>48</sup> On Qal'at Sem'an, see *RBK* 1:223–76.

<sup>49</sup> This site has been excavated many times: see most recently J. Lafontaine-Dosogne with the collaboration of B. Orgels, *Itinéraires archéologiques dans la région d'Antioche. Recherches sur le monastère et l'iconographie de saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune* (Brussels, 1967).

<sup>50</sup> *Concilium Laodicenum*, canon 35 (Mansi 2:569).

<sup>51</sup> The most celebrated sanctuary in Phrygia is that of St. Michael at Colosses, whose influence can be traced through the Michaelion of the Anaplous at Constantinople (Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.*, 2.3.8), as well as this site of the Sostheruon (Prokopios, *Aed.*, 1.8.17–19). Another celebrated church was at Germia; cf. C. Mango, "The Pilgrimage Centre of St. Michael at Germia," *JÖB* 36 (1986): 117–32.



reigns of Constantius II and Theodosios I, and their flow continued during the reigns of all the emperors of the fifth and sixth centuries. Justinian, during whose reign several of the sanctuaries to the martyrs were either constructed or rebuilt, was particularly anxious to obtain relics, to which he made clear his devotion on several occasions.<sup>52</sup> The arrival of these relics was a major event: they were solemnly received at the gates of the city with the *adventus* ceremony, and a feast day commemorated their reception and deposition in the new sanctuary. This was both a policy of Christianization as well as one directed toward the maintenance of orthodoxy. Here it is striking that the Orthodox Church tried to recover any relics in the possession of dissident groups, as with the head of John the Baptist toward the end of the fourth century which had hitherto been in the hands of the Macedonians, or with the relics of the forty martyrs rediscovered during the episcopate of Proklos (434–446) and again in 451 with a sanctuary under the church of St. Thyrses that had likewise been under Macedonian control.<sup>53</sup> It seems likely that this practice had as an object the rehabilitation of relics of heretical provenance. In any case, this policy served to elevate Constantinople to the status of a new holy city to which pilgrims would journey from afar (there were examples already during the fourth century, such as Egeria), especially after the fall of the eastern provinces to the Arabs. If Rome then became, as R. Krautheimer has written, “the magical center of the West,” Constantinople took on this role for the East while still retaining a certain attraction for those coming from the West despite the progressive separation of the two churches. Here in fact we might dispute the affirmation of the same author according to which after the seventh century “Rome remained the only holy city of Christendom,”<sup>54</sup> a perspective that is narrowly occidental to say the least.

After this brief survey of the main centers of pilgrimage within the Byzantine world, I turn to the visitors, the pilgrims themselves. What did the visitor come to do in the holy place, and why did he come? An answer was already given at the outset: he came to pray, *euches eneken*, *orationis causa*—two expressions frequently encountered in the texts of the fourth century. This prayer could be an act of gratitude, the fulfillment of a vow, a request for forgiveness, or a demand for a variety of favors. But since the pilgrim came to pray in a specific place, this basic motive could take on a particular color: his prayer would be fortified by all that the place itself could bring and contribute, which is essentially to say by all that could be seen and touched.

The pilgrim came from afar, and the language of vision played an important role in his or her discourse.<sup>55</sup> One of the best illustrations is provided by a passage from a letter in which St. Jerome invited Marcella, one of his Roman followers, to come to Palestine: “we will see (*videbimus*) the flower of Galilee. Not far from there Cana can be perceived (*cernetur*) . . . At Tabor it is with the Father and the Spirit that we will contemplate (*cernemus*) the Savior. From there we will arrive at the sea of Genesareth, and we will see (*videbimus*) four, then five thousand men fed in the desert. The town of Naïm will appear (*apparebit*). . . .

<sup>52</sup> For details, see Maraval, *Lieux saints*, 93–100. On the early transfer of relics to Constantinople, see C. Mango, “Constantine’s Mausoleum and the Translation of Relics,” *BZ* 83 (1990): 51–62.

<sup>53</sup> Sozomen, *Hist. eccles.*, 9.2.18 (p. 394.28–29, ed. Bidez-Hansen); *Chron. Pasch.*, a. 451 (PG 92:813A).

<sup>54</sup> Krautheimer, *Rome*, 201.

<sup>55</sup> See G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes, Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000).

One will gaze upon (*videbitur*) the Hermons. Capernaum can also be viewed, as well as the whole of Galilee.”<sup>56</sup> The place of pilgrimage is the place where one shows (*deiknutai*), as was noted in the *Onomasticon* of Eusebios of Caesarea. A pilgrim such as Egeria tells us that she is very curious (*satis curiosa*) and in practice on each of her visits demanded that things should be shown to her (curiously *ostendebantur* is the first word of the torn manuscript that records her text); that she should be shown “according to the Scriptures” or that she should be shown those “places the Christians delight to see.”<sup>57</sup> Seeing the places suggests what might be termed the curiosity of the tourist or perhaps even a certain scholarly interest where it was accompanied by a desire to be informed about the places concerned. Yet it should be remembered that this desire was focused exclusively on the holy places, those where the events of salvation history had taken place or those that housed souvenirs of the Christian past. In his account of the voyage of Paula, St. Jerome makes clear that he will speak only of the biblical sites. In this perspective the vision of place was already directed toward the life of prayer.

The first objective of the pilgrim was not to be better informed, but rather to nourish his or her personal prayer. If the sight of these places led the pilgrim to that end, it was because they were places of memory where one could see, hear, and even touch that which would direct one’s attention to a higher reality brought to life through contemplation. Once again Jerome illustrates this point very well when he wrote to Marcella: “Each time that we enter the tomb, we see the Savior lying on his winding sheet: if we stop there for just a moment we can still see the angel seated at his feet and at his head the folded shroud.”<sup>58</sup> In her description of the ceremonies during Holy Week at Jerusalem, Egeria stressed the importance of the readings that accompanied them, which were “adapted to the time and circumstance” and had an emotional impact manifest in the whimpers and cries (*mugitus et rugitus*) of the faithful. She herself undertook similar readings on the occasion of her private visits to the holy places, whether they were the biblical sites or the tombs of the martyrs. Moreover, if we are to believe a homily of John Chrysostom, these too had a strong emotional charge: “Go to visit a martyrrium,” he said, “and there without needing to be told the sight alone of the tomb will bring forth floods of tears and a great fervor in prayer.”<sup>59</sup> The sight of the places was thus an aid to the faith of the visitor, as Cyril of Jerusalem observed in his *Catecheses*: “He was truly crucified, and if I seek to deny it, this Golgotha where we are now assembled confounds me, the very wood of the cross divided in fragments with which the whole world is now filled.”<sup>60</sup> The contemplation of the saintly monks tended to the same end, as Theodoret of Cyrrhus noted concerning the visitors to Symeon the Stylite: “Those coming for the spectacle return instructed in things divine.”<sup>61</sup>

Yet the holy places offered more than things to see: part of the theophany that had been enacted through martyrdom or the saint that was buried there remained in the form of relics. As already noted, the very success of the pilgrimages led to the multiplication of

<sup>56</sup> Jerome, *Epist.* 46.13 (CSEL 54, p. 344).

<sup>57</sup> Egeria, *Itinerarium* 1.1, 18.5 (SC 296, pp. 120, 204).

<sup>58</sup> Jerome, *Epist.* 46.5 (CSEL 54, p. 334).

<sup>59</sup> John Chrysostom, *In SS. Mart. hom.*, 2 (PG 50:648).

<sup>60</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.* 4.10 (PG 33:468B–469A).

<sup>61</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Hist. relig.*, 26.12 (SC 257, pp. 188–89).

these relics, and very soon there was a spontaneous demand on the part of the visitors to participate in the physical veneration of the objects or to have contact with them. That is to say that there was a belief in the “living force” contained within the relics,<sup>62</sup> whether those of the true cross or the bones of the saints, and this force was somehow transmitted to its immediate surroundings, the reliquary, the tomb, the railings, or even the nearby fountain. One no longer came simply to worship *in* a holy place, but rather to adore or venerate the place itself as a means of participating in its holiness. From this stemmed many of the common practices of the pilgrims. The objective was the veneration of the relics themselves whenever that was possible, though they were more often than not inaccessible or at the very least well protected. In many different ways this was transferred to the veneration of the surroundings: prostration before the reliquary, which would be kissed and covered in tears or perfume; placing an object in the vicinity, which could then be taken back home; or even the simple inscription of a name. Among the best known of these practices, and that which was the object of particular attention on the part of the authorities responsible for the site, was incubation, a return to a long-standing pagan practice of sleeping either in the sanctuary or nearby as a means of soliciting a special favor, often that of a cure. It was also important for the pilgrim to bring away some part of this holiness that he or she came to see and touch: the ideal was of course to obtain a relic, but these were only rarely given out and only to those of civil or ecclesiastical status. The majority of pilgrims had thus to be content with *eulogiai* or *benedictiones*, relics at one stage removed that soon gave rise to a small industry in the surrounding area, for example the flasks of St. Menas, many of which were found in one of the ovens that were designed to produce them.<sup>63</sup> All of which goes to demonstrate the concern of pilgrims to appropriate through some form of physical contact part of the holiness of the place they had come from near or far to venerate.

I have remarked elsewhere that this delight in the holy places gave rise to numerous critiques, the main lines of which should at least be recounted.<sup>64</sup> There was nothing new about this criticism, which simply reproduced established arguments of the second and third centuries. A refusal to relate the divine presence to a particular place, “to enclose the omnipotence of God within too close confines,” as Jerome would put it, recalling the Gospel verse from John on worshiping in spirit and in truth.<sup>65</sup> There was also the refusal to attribute to a place a form of holiness that could be appropriated through contact, a point well made by Gregory of Nyssa, when he noted that “a change of place does not bring one closer to God, but there where you are God will come toward you, if the condition of

<sup>62</sup> This expression is used by Paulinus of Nola for the relic of the Holy Cross; cf. *Epist.* 3.6 (CSEL 29, p. 274). In the same way, the *Vita Nicolai Sionitae* talks about the *dynamis* of the Holy Cross (8, ed. G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos*, vol. 1 [Leipzig, 1913], p. 9).

<sup>63</sup> On the pilgrim's practices, see Maraval, *Lieux saints*, 221–41.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. P. W. L. Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1990); R. L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy. Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, Conn., 1992); P. Maraval, “L'attitude des Pères du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle devant les lieux saints et les pèlerinages,” *Irénikon* 65 (1992): 5–23; idem, “Jérusalem cité sainte? Les hésitations des premiers siècles,” in *La Cité de Dieu/Die Stadt Gottes* (Tübingen, 2000), 351–65; R. A. Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places,” *JChSt* 2 (1994): 257–73.

<sup>65</sup> Jerome, *Epist.* 58.3, pp. 530–31.

your soul is such that the Lord can there reside and move around (2 Cor. 6:16). But if you have the interior man (Rom. 7:22) full of evil thoughts, even if you are on Golgotha, even if you are on the Mount of Olives, even if you are in the tomb of the Anastasis, you are as far from receiving Christ within you as those who have not even begun to confess him.”<sup>66</sup> Here the visit of holy places is not condemned, but rather placed in a relative perspective. The same goes for the veneration of relics, though the texts are rare regarding this question. A letter from a bishop of Thessalonike at the beginning of the seventh century yet clearly affirms that the inhabitants of his town were not to arouse their souls to piety through the sight of and contact with relics, but to found their faith on the spirituality of the heart rather than the things of the sensible world.<sup>67</sup> The iconoclastic crisis, which attacked both the cult of images and that of relics, doubtless says much about the persistence of such reservations before what may have appeared to many brought up in a tradition of spiritual worship as an excessive materialization of the sacred.

It may be noted in conclusion that such spiritual reserve in no way impeded the development of pilgrimage, neither during the first seven centuries nor, *a fortiori*, later on. This symposium has, I think, revealed something of this richness and diversity. It also made evident, despite some points of difference, the continuity of this phenomenon in the Byzantine world, and the same could doubtless be said about the West. This period of the origins of the practice of Christian pilgrimage has the advantage of letting us examine the emergence of the specifically Christian phenomenon at the time of its first manifestations, while drawing attention to many of the problems that it posed and that were to reappear at several points throughout its history.

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<sup>66</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Epist.* 2.16–17 (GNO, p. 18; SC, pp. 120–23). On this letter and its posterity, cf. P. Maraval, “Une querelle sur les pèlerinages autour d’un texte patristique (Grégoire de Nysse, Lettre 2),” *RHPhR* 66 (1986): 130–46.

<sup>67</sup> *Miracula s. Demetrii*, 5.52 (p. 89, ed. Lemerle).